

A

LETTER

FROM

A Citizen of *Edinburgh*,

TO

Doctor *Puff*.

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L E T T E R

F R O M

A CITIZEN of *Edinburgh*,

T O

Doctor *Puff*.

A Letter, addrest to the citizens of this town, came, accidentally into my hands sometime ago ; in which I learned, that Doctor *R——d*, who now fills the Medical Chair, inclines to resign it in favours of one of his brethren.

As this epistle is not subscribed by any body, it did not occur, at first, who was the author ; until Fame, who sometimes embellishes truth, informed me, that a young Gentleman took the merit of the performance to himself.

To the public, it would seem of little importance whose composition it is. At the
same

same time, some of your particular acquaintance, it is said, do not scruple to aver, that no body can be so credulous as to believe, that a pupil of your own, daily in your house, would publish any thing on a subject, in which you are so much interested, without first advising with you ; or would rehearse facts, which happened many years ago, unless you had prompted. Besides the strength of the colouring, with which the whole of it is bedaubed, say they, leaves no room to doubt, who is the father of the child.

Upon the supposition, then, that these reasons are conclusive, I have taken the freedom to address this Epistle to you ; regretting much, some abler Citizen has not undertaken the task. But since this has not happened, I shall proceed to submit, to the sublimity of your genius, such vulgar observations as occurred to me while reading it.

In the entry, it is said, to be “ extremely
 “ surprizing there should be any hesitation
 “ whom to prefer to this chair, which can
 “ only proceed from an unacquaintance with
 “ facts ;

“ facts ; and that the patrons cannot watch,
 “ with too much care and vigilance, over
 “ the schools of medicine, nor give too much
 “ attention to the choice of these Professors,
 “ it being a matter of great concern to this
 “ town, lest the other schools mentioned,
 “ particularly that at *Philadelphia*, should ri-
 “ val us in this branch of science.”

In all these and such like sentiments, I and
 several other worthy Citizens, heartily con-
 cur, as we believe every disinterested man
 will ; in wishing that this chair, when va-
 cant, may be adjudged to the most deserving.

The great difficulty, however, for us, ho-
 nest and well-meaning Citizens, is to find
 out, who the proper person is. Here I ac-
 knowledge you are extremely kind, in point-
 ing out to us, even by name, (lest we should
 commit a mistake,) the man on whom our
 choice ought to fall, and informing us of
 many circumstances very necessary to be
 known. “ He is one, say you, of general
 ‘ worth and abilities, which are known,
 ‘ not only to us, but to the learned world ;
 ‘ that his reputation has spread itself over
 ‘ all *England* ; that his teaching the several
 “ branches

“ branches of Physic, theory and practice,
 “ are an incontestable proof he is a man of
 “ very great and considerable abilities ; and
 “ that he has a peculiar talent and felicity
 “ in communicating his thoughts ; conse-
 “ quently, he must appear eminently quali-
 “ fied to teach the practice of Medicine, as
 “ he does the study of Chemistry with dis-
 “ tinguished applause.”

When I had done reading these encomi-
 ums, I blest my fate, which had given me ex-
 istence in an age, when so great a Luminary
 of Physic appeared. Unquestionably, said I,
 this country must be happy, where a man is
 born to whom every branch of the healing-
 art is perfectly known. To send one, who
 can relieve mankind of these many ailments,
 to which humanity itself is inevitably subjected
 every moment of our existence, is surely one
 of the greatest blessings Heaven could have
 bestowed upon a sinful nation.

None of the antients ever boasted (so far
 as to me known) of such a sublime genius.
 They had, indeed, their *Hippocrates* and
Galen ; but the praises bestowed on these
 men, are no way comparable, to those be-
 stowed

stowed on our countryman. To him alone is reserved a superior knowledge in Chemy, in practice, and in the faculty of communicating his thoughts ; in a word, he is really *great* in every part.

Indulging myself in this *reverie*, a thought occurred, to wit, to inquire, what this *Man of so rising a Merit* had really done, that deserved such high applause. Not having the honour, however, to be personally acquainted with you, I immediately applied to a Friend of mine, one of the *Literati*, asking him, if ever the Doctor had published any thing, either in his own profession, or in any other branch of Science ? His answer was, that you never had ; adding, at the same time, your name indeed had been mentioned amongst the celebrated *Scotch* Authors in the edition of *Sig. Carlo Dinina's* book, printed at *Glasgow* by *R. & A. Fowlis* ; but that most people had heard of the *manoeuvre* by which that was brought about.

This answer surprized me exceedingly, as it is uncommon for one endued with a large stock of knowledge to hide his talent in a napkin, and rob the Public of the opportunity

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ty of judging coolly with respect to the extent of his learning.

Next I directed my inquiries to find out, if you, like other great men of the Profession, had invented any thing, that really tended to the benefit of us helpless mortals, such as discovering the *Balsam of Life*, *Grana Angelica*, *Universal Powder*, or *The true and genuine British Oil*, with many others too tedious to name; or, as a renowned Chemist, what Progress you had made in finding out the Philosopher's Stone, or the Grand Elixir, these unfathomable gulphs which have turned so many wise heads.

Next I inquired, if you had been useful in any shape to the Manufacturers or Artificers of this country, by assisting them with your knowledge, and thereby shewing yourself to be a worthy Patriot. But all these searches and inquiries were vain and fruitless.

Notwithstanding my want of success in discovering the grounds upon which these encomiums have been so bountifully bestowed, still I cannot help thinking, you are one who possesses a very eminent and useful talent in
 life,

life, which is the noble art of *Puffing*, an art altogether unknown to the antients.

The Roman Orator, who applied to his friend, intending to write the history of Rome, with the request *orna me*, may possibly be considered as an exception ; but there are so few instances, where any of them fall under the imputation of having laid on the paint themselves, that they scarce merit to be mentioned.

This art, to the praise of the age we live in be it spoken, is altogether a modern invention, in which this country has hitherto made but small progress.

True it is, none of the understrappers in Physic, commonly called Quacks, seem altogether ignorant how useful an Art this is to their profession, as we observe them always attended with a Trumpet to draw people to the sound of their own praises.

These reflections led me to wish, that men in power would think of some proper encouragement for adding, to the Medical Chairs, another, from whence Lectures could be given on this subject, so beneficial to every bu-

finess ; and, in a more particular manner, to that of Physic.

If this scheme shall ever be carried into execution (and surely it deserves as due consideration as many others) one may venture to affirm, that the specimen, given in this address to the Citizens, will insure you possession of the *Puffing Chair* ; there you may expatiate, at pleasure, on all human occurrences, this art knowing no bounds. There you may harrangue on the great advantage you have been to this College, by drawing numbers of foreigners to it, though we have hitherto believed that this was owing to the abilities of a Gentleman who sometime ago resigned his chair. There you may retail every singular opinion in an Author as your own ; and with propriety declare yourself, like Lord *Peters's* brown loaf, the quintessence of all Physic, Surgery, and Pharmacy.

It is now time we should come to the point, and consider your particular fitness for the Medical Chair in question, which gives rise to our present correspondence. Upon this chapter, it is said, “ That you taught this
“ branch of the profession at *Glasgow* many
“ years,

“ years ; that you have a happy talent in communicating your thoughts ; and that a man, in the practice of teaching, is preferable to one, who has not been used to it.”

This seems to be the import of what is urged to support your preference.

With respect to this plea, it must be acknowledged a very uncommon instance of Genius, to be ready to fill every vacancy that may happen in the Medical Department, as any one branch of it is thought sufficient for most men ; and, allowing that your Students at *Glasgow* formerly applauded your Lectures on this branch of Physic, does it follow that therefore you are fitter than any other person. By the bye, I cannot help observing here, how much you are to blame in not informing us, in what language these Lectures were given. Here they are delivered in Latin, to the study of which, I am told, you have applied, since your settling in this town ; so far undoubtedly there is some merit in making up the deficiencies of youth. But as it seldom happens, that people in years are endowed with the gift of tongues, which they had not imbibed when young, it is to be

be regretted, that, in enumerating all your other accomplishments, this, which is said to be the key to science, is not once mentioned. Surely it was highly necessary to inform us with respect to this point, that we might the better judge what chance you had to draw Foreigners to this Class.

Well, but it is said that the Students at *Glasgow* applauded these Lectures. And is this any thing remarkable, that a Professor, possessed of popular Talents, and who lays himself out to engage the good-will of his Scholars, should obtain that end? But in a competition, whether your Lectures, or those of another, are preferable, the only way we can judge is, by your publishing them to the world, by which every man of knowledge will have an opportunity of giving his opinion, and of judging, what part thereof is your own, and what may be borrowed from others, so that justice may be done both to yourself and creditors, if you have any. If this advice is followed, I may venture likewise to assure you, that you will in all probability procure as honest a friend as *Blas of Santilane* was to the Archbishop of *Grenada*;
though

though it is not impossible but the Friend might incur the same censure from you, as that faithful Servant did from his Master.

Further, if you are so exceedingly fit for this Chair, as is averred, pray, What reason can be assigned why Dr R———d, who, every body must allow, is a man of discernment to discover the fitness of a Successor. and of probity not to be influenced by any selfish motives, should be so blind, not only to reject your repeated solicitations, but likeways to prefer another ?

Let us now proceed to consider you in another point of view, *viz.* as a Professor of Chemistry. Here you appear teaching a branch of Natural and Experimental Philosophy, without experiments ; at least they are so few, that they become, as *Shakespear* expresses it, totally invisible to any thick sight. Every body knows, that it has been the custom of all Professors of Chemistry, that are, or have been, to perform the experiments before the Students, and then comment on them. *Nous avons change toutes cela.* You have taken the direct contrary method ; like *Bays*, you suppose all the experiments, and proceed in your
Lectures

Lectures independent of them. The apology offered is, “ That a man, engaged in
 “ practice, and advancing in life, cannot pos-
 “ sibly attend to so many experiments as a
 “ College of Chemistry requires.” How available a plea this is, he that runs may read.

This circumstance, however, is only mentioned, in order to give the world a proper idea of your method of teaching, upon which so great stress is laid ; and that people may be better enabled to judge of the plan you, probably, would follow, in harranguing from the Medical Chair ; for that Class, also, depends altogether on fact and experiment. Perhaps you would set aside all these, and substitute fancy in their place. This is, surely, more eligible for the speaker, and more agreeable to the hearer. Others borrow with much labour from Nature and Authors who describe her ; but a man of genius should, like *Bays*, fetch it purely out of his own fancy.

However, in order to obtain a change, Dr *B——k* is next brought on the stage, as one of the *Dramatis Personæ*, and recommended

mended as a person proper to succeed you. The Doctor's skill in Chemistry nobody will controvert. But is this a reason why the Medical Chair should suffer? Dr R——d certainly thinks, the interest of his class depends on the choice he has made. Ought not his recommendation to have as much weight in the scale, as yours? especially in a matter where you are so immediatly interested, and wherein it is not pretended he is influenced by any motives of friendship or interest. Let us pass by the evident impropriety of taking upon you, to name the successor; and rejecting the recommendation of a Gentleman, who, after having served long and meritoriously, in his old age, inclines to retire, and indulge himself in that ease he has so well merited.

To come to a question, that does not appear of easy solution. How happens it, that you would quit a Chair, attended by so many Students, to accept of another, not so lucrative? Chemy is a study pursued by many of the learned, but the practice of Medicine, by those alone who intend to follow it as a profession; and as this has been always the case,

case, from the nature of the thing, it must continue so. What construction ought to be put on such a scheme shall be left untouched, that every person may be at full liberty to judge, as seemeth unto him best.

Let us now proceed to a very remarkable anecdote on this important subject, *viz.* The supposed scheme, the Patrons of the University are said to have in agitation, of publickly consulting the College of Physicians on the present question. You begin with praising the choice they have uniformly made, in all times past ; and, in general, it is certainly true ; their merit in this respect is considerable. But it is carrying the *elogium* rather too far, to maintain that this has always been the case. We need not travel a great way off for an example. Dr *B——k* is said to have been a candidate along with you, when *P——r* fell sick, and your letter points him out, as the ablest Chemist of the two ; yet you was chosen. Be this as it will, we may rest satisfied, the present members of the Town-council are men of so much honour, as to act that part in all such cases, as shall appear

appear the most eligible for the credit of the University, or utility of this city.

And now I come to what appears the most curious part of this Epistle, *viz.* the representation given of your own brethren, whom you allow to be the best judges of Physical merit. But notwithstanding this mighty concession, you still seem afraid of submitting to their decision. The reasons given are, “ That
 “ this College, like other societies, is liable
 “ to prejudice and partiality, and affection and
 “ enmity. . . Interest, prejudice and passion,
 “ may pervert their judgments.”

Now, pray good Doctor, what enmity, interest or prejudice can they possibly have against you ? Is it because you are the learnedest Physician of our city ? This would be too jocular ; I shall therefore compose the features of my countenance.

If, indeed, none of them had ever given any public testimony of their learning, there would be some room for such a supposition ; but, amongst them, many have not only by practice, but also by their writings, deservedly, acquired a reputation, both here, and in other countries. True, you allow us Citizens to
 consult,

consult the most sufficient and unbiassed Judges. Pray who are these? surely no set of men can be so sufficient, or less biassed than your own Brethren; not even your own Students, whom you are so fond of.

It is insinuated, however, that if the members were advised with privately and separately, they would not hesitate to give you the palm of glory; but if consulted publicly in a body, they would act quite the contrary part.

I do not know how these Gentlemen relish this picture you have drawn of them. To me the colouring is strong, to suppose these Physicians worthy honest men in private, but no sooner do they meet, publicly, in a body, than they lay aside, with their cloaks, every sentiment of honour and morality. Let me add, that to reject a jury of one's peers, to whose verdict we must submit our lives, properties and characters, generally speaking, implies a consciousness of some defect. It puts me in mind of an incident that happened sometime ago to an old Bachelor whose acquaintance proposed to him to marry a young Widow. What, says he, shall
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undergo a comparative trial at my time of life ?

In the next place, you tell us that the late Town-council rejected the scheme of consulting the College. It were to be wished you had named your informer, seeing some care has been taken to search all the Magazines and Chronicles of that period, and yet we cannot find that this was ever thought of, or mentioned to them publicly or privately ; so that it is impossible to avoid giving this fact the epithet which the Dean of *St Patricks* does to all such averments, *viz. telling that which is not.*

And now, *my good Doctor*, having thus touched at the most material heads of your address ; I am unwilling to detain you longer from the busy scene, that employs you and your talents, and from which you draw so much benefit to *yourself*.—If I have fallen short of that praise and panegyric, you so *justly* deserve, it is my misfortune, not my fault. Therefore, as a consequence of your *disinterestedness*, I can hardly doubt your forgiveness ; surely no offence can be taken, where none is intended, for so your *Address* says.

Having

Having done with you, I should think myself unexcusable in regard to others, into whose hands this may fall, did I tire their patience. An epistle like a tale, should never be too long. To their candid judgment, therefore, is submitted what has been said upon the whole.

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